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NSC BRIEFING

24 JANUARY 1956

**SOUTH VIETNAM**

*Made ~~some~~ limited progress*

I. President Diem, whose regime has been ~~progressing~~ *dealing with South Vietnam's major pol, ec, & security problems* without setbacks since he drove Binh Xuyen gangsters out of Saigon last spring, has finally announced date (4 March) for long-promised assembly elections.

- A. 123 assembly members will have, as first job, approval of government-drafted constitution.
- B. Delay in setting date for election (first scheduled for Dec '55) has been caused by government's careful preparations, aimed at keeping everything under control.

- 1. These government control efforts have alienated a number of former pro-government elements, brought charges of dictatorship against Diem.
- 2. However, Diem justifies tight controls on grounds his government still at war with Viet Minh.

C. Actual setting of election date is reflection government's confidence.

II. Security situation, although vastly improved since last spring, is still far from satisfactory.

A. Although Binh Xuyen armed force has been destroyed and its tough-talking chief is refugee in France, combat-effectiveness of remaining Hoa Hao rebels (in southwest) has been bucked up by Viet Minh aid and guidance.

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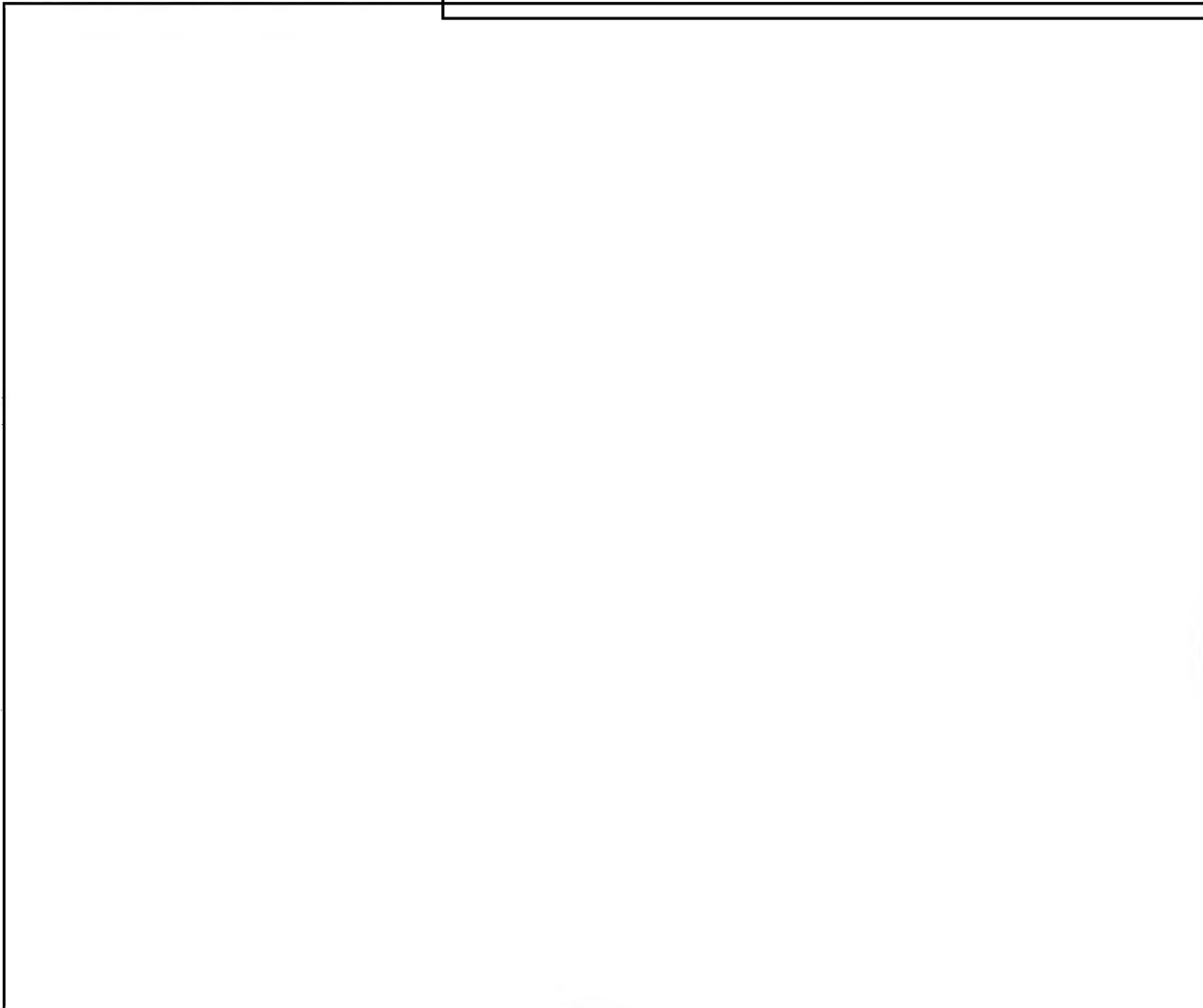
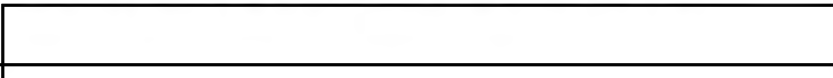
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- B. In clash with Hoa Hao on 13 Jan, Vietnamese army suffered heaviest casualties in any single action since end of war (61 killed and missing, including battalion commander).
- C. Army now has more than 20,000 troops deployed against some 3,200 Hoa Hao.
- D. By alliance with Hoa Hao rebels, Viet Minh manages to fight Diem and at same time avoid open violation of Geneva terms.

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III. Viet Minh link with Hoa Hao is only one of many angles in Viet Minh anti-Diem effort.



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**IV. Viet Minh effort apparently not tied to any timetable:**

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**A. Hanoi violently denounces Diem's election plans as American-inspired plot to sabotage unification effort. Calls for boycott.**

**1. Viet Minh similarly denounced last October's referendum on Bao Dai, but turnout was good and Diem got 98% of vote.**

**B. Absence of VM interference last Oct is indication of Viet Minh's unwillingness show hand before time ripe.**

**C. But gradual improvement of Diem's security services is also an important factor.**

**V. Even after Mar elections, Diem will still face problem of how to handle his inheritance from Geneva--all-Vietnam elections for unification, called for in July '56.**

**A. He adamantly refuses to accept commitments made by France at '54 Geneva conference.**

**B. French have neither intention nor capability of meeting these commitments: Expeditionary Corps down to about 20,000 men.**

**1. Diem has asked for complete withdrawal of Corps, anticipating that his relations with French government will be more difficult if Republican Front is installed.**

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2. Such a government in Paris might complicate matters by putting new emphasis on Sainteny's mission, diplomatic pressure for strict adherence to Geneva terms.
- C. But, although future of International Control Commission is cloudy, even Indians--who chair it--appear to recognize that all-Vietnam elections are now virtually out of question.

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